

Chalk Talk

A routine for silently considering ideas, questions, or problems and responding to others.

Looking at the topical question written on the chart paper:

- What ideas come to mind when you consider this idea, question, or problem?
- What connections can you make to the others' responses?
- What questions arise as you think about the ideas and consider the responses and comments of others?

PURPOSE

What kind of thinking does this routine encourage?

This routine asks learners to consider ideas, questions, or problems by silently responding in writing both to the prompt and the thoughts of others. This “silent conversation” provides learners with time to follow through thoughts without interruption by choosing when they are ready to consider other points of view and make comments.

APPLICATION

When and where can I use it?

This routine highlights the notion of building understanding in a collaborative way through putting forward ideas, questioning one another, and developing the ideas further. Since individuals are asked to sign their comments, there is a degree of an anonymity that will free up some learners to take more risk and offer ideas. This activity can also be used for reflection.

LAUNCH

What are some tips for starting and using this routine?

1. Set Up

- Write (above) prompt on a large sheet of chart paper and place on tables around room. Have markers available. Decide if you wish to assign students to groups or allow them to move freely around the room.

2. Present the "Chalk Talk" Prompt

- Invite learners to think about their reactions to the prompt and record the ideas and questions. Encourage learners to read and to add to each other's responses with additional comments and questions.

3. Circulate

- Provide time for learners to circulate around the "Chalk Talk" paper, reading and adding to the prompts and responses as they build. If working in groups you may want them to stay with one recording sheet for 5 min. to allow conversation to develop. Groups can then rotate en masse to another group's paper, silently reading what is written there, and adding their reactions and questions to the paper.

4. Facilitate

- May need to prompt the group about the types of responses they can make as they read: connecting ideas, elaborating on others' ideas, commenting on what others have written, asking others to respond with more detail, and so on.

5. Share the Thinking

- If people have rotated as a group, allow them to return to their original starting places to read what others have written on "their" "Chalk Talk" paper. Ask the group what themes they noticed emerging. What did they see as common issues and reactions? What questions surprise them? Debrief the process itself, asking the group how their thinking developed during the "Chalk Talk" process.

It's important to monitor the time and keep group apprised of the time.

This routine is adapted from Hilton Smith of the Foxfire Fund.

This thinking routine was developed as part of the Cultures of Thinking project at Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Explore the full PZ Thinking Routine Toolbox at pz.harvard.edu/thinking-routines.